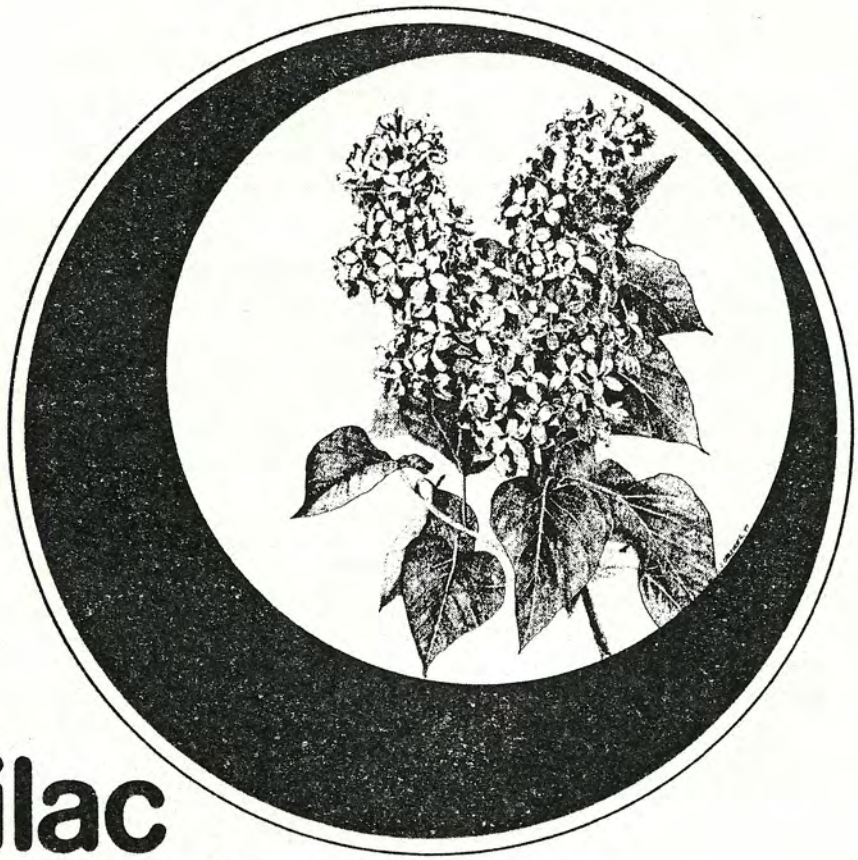

Lilac Newsletter

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INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY

INTERNATIONAL LILAC SOCIETY is a non-profit corporation comprised of individuals who share a particular interest, appreciation and fondness for lilacs. Through exchange of knowledge, experience and facts gained by members it is helping to promote, educate and broaden public understanding and awareness.

Articles printed in this publication are the views and opinions of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the editor or the *International Lilac Society.*

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MEMBERSHIP CLASSIFICATION

	1980 ($ US)
Single annual	7.50
Family	10.00
Sustaining	15.00
Institutional/Commercial	20.00
Life	150.00

*Mail membership dues to I.L.S. Secretary.

LILACS AT THE DEVONIAN BOTANIC GARDEN

by Roger Vick

October 8, 1981

Edmontonians really appreciate the lilac season in early June after the long white winter. With temperatures frequently well below 0° F, and dipping to -40° F or colder, the reliable spring blooming of these hardy shrubs is a symbol of grace combined with a cast iron constitution.

On their way to work ladies are tempted to pick a spray or two of the lilacs that lean enticingly over the garden fence by the bus stop. Standing rather like self conscious bridesmaids, they clasp the bouquets with both hands, waiting to carry their fragrant prize to brighten the sterility of the city office.

The common lilac has historical significance in this area, as it came in with the first settlers in the late nineteenth century. By the time of the Klondike gold rush (when Edmonton, Alberta served as an outfitting station for prospectors) lilacs had become the basis of most home gardens, jostling for space with white spruce transplanted from the surrounding woodland, herbs, vegetables and a few tough but cheerful perennials like scarlet lightning and dames rocket.

Many other plants failed in this climate, as they were brought from Europe and the milder regions of North America. The common privet, for example, is not hardy enough, nor laburnum, holly, smokebush, woodbine nor

European elder. This was perplexing to most newcomers, as the Edmonton latitude of 53° 34'N places us further south than Edinburgh in Scotland, and Moscow in the USSR. It is the elevation of over 2,200 feet, east of the Canadian Rocky Mountains, that results in a short growing season.

Mean statistics (with emphasis on the mean) tell us that plant growth starts about April 23, that the last spring frost can be expected on June 3, and the first fall frost on September 3. But these average statistics can vary tremendously, and during the past sixteen years in Edmonton I have seen more than one killing frost in the middle of June, first fall frosts before the end of August, and the occasional warm Indian summer that glows on into late October.

Understandably then, if a flowering shrub can be relied upon to survive and flower year after year under such conditions, it has a special value in the region and should be well represented at the local botanic garden.

The University of Alberta Devonian Botanic Garden was founded in 1959 with the donation of 80 acres of land some 15 miles south-west of the city. The topography is mainly of stabilized sand dunes, with organic wetland and slough. The soil is a slightly acid, fine alluvial sand, with a sharp transition to slightly alkaline peat-soil at lower elevations.

Prime objectives of this garden are plant introduction, and the display of plants suitable for cultivation in this area. The plants must be correctly labelled with botanical and cultivar names. The emphasis is on ornamental plants (both woody and herbaceous) displayed in a naturalistic setting by retaining as much of the native flora as possible.

In 1960, as the botanic garden started

to establish some lilac sultivars (mostly from the Canada Research Station at Morden as part of the Prairie Regional Trials for Woody Ornamentals) it soon became evident that the growth and general vigour of our plants was notably less than those within the city of Edmonton. This was attributed to the fact that the botanic garden is in a rural location where the climate is not modified by the city environment. In fact it has been determined from other plant records that there is about one complete hardiness zone difference between the city and surrounding rural sites.

The first lilac plantings were set out in upland clearings among the natural stands of jackpine, white spruce, aspen and paper birch; the native shrubs being mostly pin-cherry, chokecherry, beaked hazelnut and saskatoon. Holes were dug for ample root development and a good soil mix was used within the planting hole.

After a few season we noted that the native grasses and other herbaceous flora had successfully invaded the enriched soil, and were competing strongly against the lilacs. Unable to irrigate, lack of moisture was a major factor in their slow growth; the annual precipitation is 18.5" (47 cm) per year, 28% of which falls as snow, and partially evaporates. In the low organic soil areas it was the moist and somewhat cold soil conditions which appeared to retard lilac growth.

Sometimes it takes a minor tragedy to bring about changes for the better. This was the case when, in 1974, the lowland areas of the garden were flooded due to unusual weather, and blocked drainage in the surrounding land due to acreage development. Plant losses in low areas were substantial.

Following the flood, several areas of the botanic garden were built up with imported soil, and it was one of these areas that received a black clay soil from the city. Unlike the garden soil, which is easy to work even after rain, this heavy clay tends to bake quite hard in the sun. After rain it becomes too heavy and greasy to work. Local gardeners often speak disparagingly of the black clay soil as "gumbo", so naturally this new shrub border became known as "the gumbo belt".

Because lilacs had been slow to perform in the sand or peat soils, recent acquisitions of lilac cultivars have been planted in the gumbo belt. The remaining lilacs in moist organic soil are still slow growing, as are the ones in the sandy uplands, but the ones in the heavy clay soil have made excellent progress, and flower well.

Encouraged by the improved display in 1981, I took additional field notes, and looked for cultivar descriptions in texts and catalogues in order to confirm the names. At this point I realized again that descriptions of many cultivars were so vague as to be quite inadequate to confirm identity.

Using the Colour Code chart of the R.H.S., and taking careful measurements of floret diameter and tube length, I was soon armed with some comparative observations that would serve to differentiate between the lilacs on hand. Thus prepared, I contacted the International Registration Authority for the genus Syringa at RBG Hamilton, Ontario, to see if more up to date and complete descriptions were available, and received a wealth of information.

The Tentative International Register of

Cultivar Names in the Genus Syringa (April 1976) by Owen M. Rogers, University of New Hampshire, revealed that much work had been accomplished in compiling a comprehensive list, but that there is still more to be done to bring it up to date. Unfortunately, descriptions are limited in that work to the state of double or single floret, the colour (with a choice of only seven colours), and the appropriate species of the cultivar. This format is based on the 1942 and 1953 publications Lilacs for America by John Wister.

Currently my personal objective is to confirm the names of the better lilac cultivars that are offered for sale across the Canadian prairies, and those that are not yet readily available but have proven their worth at this garden.

In order to achieve this goal, it appears that there must be increased comparison of notes between trained observers so that we might nail down some descriptions of lilac cultivars still being grown. At the same time it should be possible to sharpen our focus on the better selections by designating quite a number listed in the Register as "obsolete".

When I am satisfied that the names of our lilac collection are as they should be, I would like to discuss in the Lilac Newsletter some impressions of the better ones suited to central Alberta.

Common names mentioned in the preceeding article

aspen	Populus tremuloides
beaked hazelnut	Corylus cornuta
chokecherry	Prunus virginiana
dame's rocket	Hesperis matronalis
European elder	Sambucus nigra
jackpine	Pinus banksiana
laburnum	Laburnum anagyroides
paper birch	Betula papyrifera
pincherry	Prunus pensylvanica
privet	Ligustrum vulgare
saskatoon	Amelanchier alnifolia
scarlet lightning	Lychnis chalcedonica
smokebush	Cotinus x coggygria
white spruce	Picea glauca
woodbine	Lonicera periclymenum

ELECTION OF I.L.S. DIRECTORS

It is that time of the year when the Members of the I.L.S. should start considering whom they would like to nominate to the Board of Directors. The Nominating Committee would appreciate suggestions of members that might be considered for nomination.

Please send your suggestions to:

Max Peterson, Chairman
Nominating Committee
RR 1, Box 273
Ogallala, Nebraska
U.S.A. 69153

To be assured of consideration, your suggestions should be received before February 1, 1982.

Following is a list of Directors currently serving:

Elected 1979 (for 3 year term)	Elected 1980 (for 3 year term)
Dr. Robert Clark	Marie Chaykowski
Fr. John Fiala	Nancy Emerson
William Heard	Dr. Joel Margaretten
Charles Holetich	Walter Eickhorst
Walter Oakes	Winfried Martin
Max Peterson	Lyle Littlefield
Dr. Owen Rogers	John Carvill
William Utley	Pauline Fiala

Elected 1981
(for 3 year term)

John Alexander III
Thomas Chieppo
Dr. Donald Egolf
Elsie Kara
George Kidd
Maurice Lockwood
Roger Luce
Sarah Schenker

For the Nominating Committee

Max Peterson, Chairman

GARDEN NOTES FROM THE PLANT RESEARCH INSTITUTE, OTTAWA

by A.R. Buckley

FALL IS LILAC PLANTING TIME

The lilacs flourishing in the Ornamental gardens and Arboretum of the Plant Research Institue have long since proved that these shrubs may be successfully planted in the fall. Right now, in fact, is about the best time for the job, since the weather is cool and the soil moist. In spring, unless the planting is done early, there is some danger of drying winds damaging the young unfurling shoots.

Lilacs are very adaptable to our climate and to various uses around the home: as specimens for planting near the patio, as screen plants and as tall shrubs in the border.

It is no small wonder that over forty years ago Dr. W.T. Macoun of the Central Experimental Farm launched a program of lilac breeding - a project carried out by Miss Isabella Preston and one that eventually resulted in the famous Preston group of lilacs made up of varieties obtained by crossing hardy species. Dr. Macoun's aim was to extend the flowering season of these plants. His objective, with Miss Preston's unique plant breeding ability, was not only reached but extended to the production of cultivars having quite distinctive coloring and with blooms having a cascade effect as they hung from the graceful bushy plants.

Surprisingly enough, these lovely Preston hybrids which were bred in this area are still

very little known or grown, and some searching is necessary before they can be located in nurserymen's catalogues.

As far as individual blossoms are concerned, the Preston lilacs are not necessarily better than the French hybrids, nor were the Preston lilacs bred to supersede these older and better-known types. The Preston lilacs, however, supplement the French hybrids by having introduced pinkish tones and flowers that are either earlier, such as those of the lavender Patricia, or later, such as those in the Preston Shakespeare series, which among others, includes the varieties 'Elinor', 'Ursula', and 'Guinevere'.

On the advice of Dr. Macoun, western plant breeders also bred earlier and later varieties of lilacs by using the same species, with the result that there are now many interesting and attractive Preston hybrids available. If your nurseryman does not already have them in stock, ask him to get for you the following cultivars listed here with the color: 'Coral' pink; 'Donald Wyman', dark reddish purple; 'Hiawatha, lilac rose; 'Nocturne', lilac blue; 'Redwine', wine red; 'Royalty', violet purple; 'Elinor', pale violet; and 'Fountain', with cascades of light pink bloom. These represent about the best of the hybrids originated by Miss Preston, by Dr. Skinner of Dropmore, Manitoba and by hybridizers at the Canada Department of Agriculture Research Station, Morden, Manitoba.

Among the French hybrid lilacs tested at the Plant Research Institute I strongly recommend the following as hardy, of pleasing scent and color, and having large trusses of bloom:

Single whites - 'Maud Notcutt', 'White Hyacinth', 'Mont Blanc'
Double whites - 'St. Joan', 'Mme. Lemoine'
Single violet - 'De Mirabel'
Double violet - 'Marchal Lannes'
Single blue - 'Clark's Giant', 'Blue Hyacinth', 'Firmament', 'Crepusculé'
Double blue - 'Olivier de Serres', 'Ami Schott'
Single lilac - 'Christophe Colomb', 'Jacques Callot'
Double lilac - 'Leon Gambetta', 'Victor Lemoine'
Single pinkish - 'Lucie Baltet'
Double pinkish - 'Mme. Antoine Buchner', 'Belle de Nancy'
Single reddish-purple - 'Capitaine Baltet', 'Congo'
Double reddish-purple - 'Charles Joly', 'Mrs. Edward Harding'
Single deep purple - 'Andenken an Ludwig Spaeth', 'Monge', 'Etna'
Double deep purple - 'Adelaide Dunbar', 'Paul Hariot'

For those who want only six and want both Preston types and French hybrids I would suggest 'Donald Wyman', 'Coral', 'Clarke's Giant', 'Elinor', 'Monge', and 'Capitaine Baltet'.

Most of the Preston lilacs are easily grown from cuttings and most nurserymen propagate them this way. The French lilacs, however, are often grafted on the common lilac. This means that at all times a very careful watch must be kept for suckers that arise from the base of these lilacs. If these are not removed they will grow and eventually crowd out the original lilac cultivar and will replace it by one with much inferior blossoms. However, the trend among American and Canadian nurserymen now is to grow all lilacs from cuttings,

so this problem is completely eliminated. Ask your nurseryman for details and he will advise you whether or not the lilacs are grafts.

A few tips about looking after lilacs. Always remove the old trusses of bloom as they fade so as to encourage the formation of the following year's bloom buds. Do not cut blooms below the two shoots that arise from just beneath the flower clusters; these bear next year's trusses. When a shrub gets over ten years old, remove some of the older wood completely to the ground each year so as to gradually rejuvenate the plant.

October 21, 1968

Canada Department of Agriculture
Information Division
Ottawa, Canada